



1PMG Roleplaying

1 Player & Multiple Gamemasters

RPG Frameworks
for play-by-email
or play-by-chat

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Jim Vassilakos

In my article “Writing Fiction Through Play-by-Email”¹ (PBEM), I wrote about a 1PMG (single-player, multi-gamemaster) PBEM I’m GMing with the help of Timothy Collinson. The write-up reads a little bit like a novel and can be downloaded from <https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/plank.html>.

Jeff Zeitlin asked me to write a followup on how to get such a campaign up and running, but I’ve been somewhat reluctant, because I can sense there’s a lot of different ways to do this, and I’ve only scratched the surface of 1PMG roleplaying.

I can’t help but be reminded of this famous moment in RPG history where Gygax invites Arneson to his house to run Blackmoor. They’re playing it on a ping pong table covered with butcher paper², and Gygax realizes this is a whole new type of game nobody’s ever seen before, and he’s completely blown away. I don’t want to make the claim that 1PMG is a whole new type of game, but it may well be a new style of roleplaying, and it can also be used as a method of authorship.

What’s going on here is that we’ve basically inverted the paradigm. The traditional method of multiple players and one gamemaster has been tried repeatedly. It’s pretty well-explored. By contrast,



Dave Arneson

1PMG is largely unexplored territory, so I can’t claim to have developed a set of best practices. Other people will have to explore this further and figure out what works well and what doesn’t.

But what I can tell you, pretty unequivocally, is that you can write campaign-based fiction this way. It may not be great fiction. Indeed, it may be terrible, but it’s still a way to collaboratively write stories, and so far it’s been both fun and relatively easy. At least, it’s less work and less stress than running a standard tabletop campaign.

For one thing, it requires fewer participants, so it’s definitely something to consider if you can’t easily put together a standard-sized group. Also, PBEMs are asynchronous by nature, so if you’re aiming to use in a PBEM, that also makes it logistically easier. Likewise, it’s far less of an ordeal than writing a novel.

When writing fiction, it’s easy to write yourself into the weeds, but roleplaying seems to have some sort of course-corrective quality. The back-and-forth of the story’s construction generates its own momentum, which simply doesn’t exist when writing as a solo-author.

In the previous article I discussed some of the potential benefits as well as a few of the pitfalls. In this one, I’m going to take you on a step-by-step journey that I hope will give you the tools you need to get a 1PMG PBEM up and running. Just beware that there are other ways of doing this. I’m essentially a neophyte. I’m like some guy who discovered an uninhabited island, and now I’m trying to describe it, and I really can’t, because it’s too big for one expedition to fully explore. All I can do is give you directions and tell you what I’ve discovered so far. So I’ll do my best to help you find your way so that you too can begin exploring to determine whether this style of roleplaying works for you.

¹ <https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/preproom/pbemfic.html> or see Freelance Traveller #125, page 6.

² This purportedly happened in November of 1972. Dave was running the game, and the players were Gary, Rob Kuntz, Ernie Gygax, and Terry Kuntz. However, this was so long ago, who can say how many of these details I’ve got straight? Probably only the people who were actually there.

Step 1: Choose or Create a Campaign Setting

Don't look at me like that. Of course, this is the first step. This is the first step of running any sort of RPG campaign. But with 1PMG, there's a twist. In a multiplayer campaign, you can get away with running generic adventures, because it's pretty much assumed that because there will be multiple player-characters (PCs), there will be a variety of skills in the party's toolbox. However, single-player campaigns are by their very nature usually focused on a single character, and since you don't yet know what sort of character your player is going to come up with, it's hard to know what aspects of worldbuilding to focus on.

Obviously, if you're using a published setting, make sure you have a basic familiarity with it. You don't have to be an expert on every last detail, but you need to have the knowledge and resources to look stuff up. If the setting is one that's as sprawling and epic as that of Traveller's Imperium, you need to accept in advance that there's a lot you don't know. I made great use of the TravellerWiki³, which was an absolutely indispensable resource. I also asked a lot of questions on the Traveller Mailing List (TML)⁴, another indispensable resource.

Even if the setting you're running is fairly compact, I'd still recommend subscribing to an online discussion forum for the RPG and/or setting in question, because you may become confused about the best way to handle some issue. Of course, you'll consult with your co-GM, but it's always better to have access to multiple outside opinions. Even if they don't change your mind, it's still useful to consider what different people have to say on any given topic. I believe it'll make you a better GM.

Now, if you're using an RPG & setting of your own design, then, first of all, kudos to you. That's fantastic. You're going to benefit a lot from running this sort of campaign, because the whole process, no matter how it goes, will prompt you to think more deeply about your setting. You'll come across questions you never would have considered. Don't worry. It'll be fun. But in the meantime, you need to create a Setting Document, which should include basic information that most any player-character who lives in the setting would know. You'll need this in order to...

³ <https://wiki.travellerrpg.com/>

⁴ <https://www.simplelists.com/tml/subscribe/>

Step 2: Create an Online Advertisement or Elevator Pitch

The goal here is to find at least two participants, one to be your Co-GM, and one to be the player. If you get more than two people responding, that's great. You can have them run various non-player characters (NPCs), if you like, or you can have one act as an understudy to the player, with or without the right to kibitz. If you want to get really adventurous, you can try GMing-by-committee. In short, there are a vast multitude of ways you could structure your group. I'll outline some of these options in Step 5, but for now I'll just show you the advertisements I initially wrote and briefly tell you how it went.

18-Jun-2021

<https://www.simplelists.com/tml/msg/16882428/>

"This is a bit off-topic, but for the past few years... not exactly sure how long... I've been thinking about running a new type of PBEM, one that follows a single character (like many novels) but which uses multiple GMs (because GMing is hard, and two or more heads are better than one). If anyone would be interested in taking part in something like this, let me know."

Believe it or not, this advertisement, as vague as it was, actually worked. Phil Pugliese was the first to respond, and so I asked him, *"Have you put any thought into your preference with respect to roles (player vs. co-gm)?"* He opted for player. We were already discussing the protagonist he would play when Timothy Collinson offered to co-GM.

I sent Timothy a document detailing two of the possible RPG Frameworks we could use, and he essentially answered that he wanted to be more in the background, coming up with NPC write-ups and occasionally playing NPCs. He mentioned his struggles with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and said that depending on the pace of the game, it might be difficult for him to keep up.

Since two people were all I needed, we were essentially off to the races. Within a few months, however, Phil and I clashed over the standards and assumptions of the campaign, and he ended up resigning. Here's the advertisement I posted for his replacement.

29-Oct-2021

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/travellerpg/permalink/4418277951623679>

“Wanted: One or more additional participants for an ongoing Traveller PBEM, an active-duty naval campaign to be more specific. You must be a strong writer, easy-going, patient, and a good ROLEplayer with a preference for characterization over action. Warning: There are about thirty pages of required reading before you can start. Additional Warning: The game’s framework is a bit of an experiment and will be unlike other PBEMs in which you may have participated. More details upon request. Please contact me privately.”

I received quite a few responses, so I decided to give each respondent a writing assignment with a fairly tight deadline, and Conrad Rader was the only one who came through. The main thing I want you to get from all this is that it’s pretty easy to find players online. If you have gaming buddies in mind, far-flung friends with whom you’d like to stay in contact, then all the better. But if you don’t, that’s fine, because finding participants online is not very hard. What’s harder is to effectively...

Step 3: Screen Applicants

Phil told me three important things up-front, any one of which should have dissuaded me from moving forward. I, however, foolishly put aside what he was saying. Since it was an experimental campaign, I figured I’d just take whoever volunteered on a first-come/first-served basis, and whatever happened, I’d learn something. So I’ll take you through the three things he told me.

First, he said he wanted to play a science-fiction version of himself. This is not all unusual in roleplaying. Most of the time, I think, the character is a projection of the player. It’s not always the case, of course. Sometimes a player will play a character who is different from themselves possibly as a way of “trying on” a different personality to experiment with what it feels like to be someone else.⁵ Without realizing it, I definitely wanted someone in this second group, someone who wanted to play a

character with a personality somewhat different from their own, because I wanted a protagonist who had character flaws as well as a player who was conscious of those flaws. I wanted a protagonist who the reader could laugh at, if only a little bit, and I wanted the player to be able to laugh too, because that’s all part of what makes a great character. I’m not saying you have to select a player with this in mind, but it’s something you might at least consider.

Secondly, he said he hated modern writing. I discussed this in greater depth in my essay in *Alarums & Excursions* #581. I don’t want to reiterate it here. I’ll just make the point that there are, indeed, different writing styles, just like there are different styles of music. Would you invite your mother, who likes opera, to a heavy metal concert? Probably not. And make no mistake, a PBEM is a writing project, so the participants need to be on the same wavelength in terms of what sort of style of story they want to cooperatively tell. If one person wants old-style heroics, à la Flash Gordon or Buck Rogers, and the other wants to run a soap opera, there’s going to be some friction. Incidentally, I’m the soap opera guy.

Third, and this was the thing that ultimately led to Phil’s resignation, he had a vision of Traveller’s Imperium that differed somewhat from my own, and it’s worth discussing this in greater depth so that you can see and understand this potential pitfall more clearly. Traveller has been through many editions, and it has changed quite a bit over the years. For example, initially there was almost no cybernetics in Traveller, but later editions included it.⁶ If you have a potential player who says they want to play one version of the game and not another, you’d do well to pay close attention.

So to be more specific, he said that in Classic Traveller, a lot of the nobles are like the royalty here on earth, largely impotent figureheads whose main role in public discourse is to serve as a cultural rallying point as well as tabloid-fodder. They could have varying degrees of power, he admitted. However, he asserted that it was MegaTraveller that established a strict hierarchy of nobles, each with absolute authority enforced by the Imperial Navy, and that he didn’t want to play in that sort of setting.

I think he was mistaken in his last statement regarding MegaTraveller establishing the hierarchy of nobles. I first saw it in Classic Traveller’s *Supplement*

⁵ D&D’s Character Alignments were an early impetus for this sort of thing.

⁶ See footnote #44 on page 48 of the Plankwell Campaign write-up. <https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/plank.html>

11: Library Data (N-Z), pages 34-37. In any case, I responded to Phil's concerns on this issue as follows:

"My general sense is that there are probably constitutional monarchs who wield power subject to publicly elected assemblies, so they may not have the power of life and death over their subjects. Similarly, there are probably nobles who oversee democracies, theocracies, bureaucracies, and other various forms of government, and their powers are no doubt limited by whatever arrangement has been negotiated. But if their subjects get sufficiently out-of-line so as to become a threat or embarrassment to the noble at the next level of the interstellar hierarchy, then there may be a clandestine action or perhaps even some sort of 'police action' that may or may not involve the Imperial Navy. Of course, the Imperium would prefer to work through cut-outs, either megacorporations or other planetary princes who are probably naturally antagonistic to the notion of democracy spreading to their realms. In such cases, the Imperial Navy might be called in for peacekeeping after the initial point has been made. At least, that's my general supposition."

In response, Phil pointed me to https://wiki.travellerrpg.com/Feudal_Confederation), quoting the line *"Interstellar government begins at the subsector level."*

I didn't agree with this statement and still don't. As I understand it, interstellar government begins at a hundred planetary diameters, and it also reigns in the starport and the Imperial compound of the reigning noble, and there may be Imperial agencies that exert their will in various ways. But I didn't see the point in having a big argument about it. I understood Phil didn't want to play in a campaign where the reigning noble on *any given planet* was the ultimate authority on whatever happened there. My understanding of Traveller was that every planet is unique. On some, the reigning noble will be a figurehead. On others, the reigning noble will be a dictator. It all depends on the specific world and its history. So I thought we were pretty much on the same page.

When I posted the introduction of Lady Alise⁷, with all the NPCs bowing and Alise looking at Captain Plankwell *"as a child might look upon some strange toy for the first time, her nose wrinkling,*

though at least she was smiling," Phil seemed to initially be okay with it. But then I posted a question to the Traveller Mailing List⁸ regarding my initial intention to refer to Alise as a princess (which I actually did on page 22 of the campaign write-up), and I even opined that *"nobles need to have a little more oomph,"* which was, of course, something Phil was very much against. He felt they should be *de-oomphed*. Based on both his and Timothy's input, I reverted to calling Alise a lady rather than a princess, but Phil let me know privately that he didn't want to play in a campaign where nobles were as powerful as he sensed I wanted to make them.

I could have smoothed things over, telling him that I didn't intend to make the Imperial Countess all-powerful. Granted, I intended to make her powerful to some degree. But, I hadn't yet determined how powerful she would be. In any case, I could have smoothed things over, but my instincts as a long-time GM kicked in, instincts that told me to let this one go. I probably would have thought twice if we'd been old friends, but we'd only been gaming for a few months, and I'd already come to the conclusion that it wasn't going to work out. So I said, *"I understand. If you would like to resign from the game, just say the word."* And he did.

Rather than end the campaign, however, I decided to look for a replacement, and by the end of that same day, I had four people who said they were interested in filling Phil's shoes, so the campaign continued. I felt that Timothy and I had already sunk too much effort to just let it die this way. Also, I sensed that although Phil had taught me several important lessons, there was still much more to learn.

So when it comes to screening applicants, assume there will be points of conflict existing across multiple dimensions⁹, and your job is to find them and then really think about them, because these people, whoever you select, will become long-term writing partners. So you have to be a little bit careful, you have to be clear about what you're looking for, and you have to really listen to what they're telling you. Take notes on what they say. Make sure you don't step on their toes after they take off their shoes and get comfortable. Most importantly, do not steer away from conflict at the beginning. Steer into it, so you can really understand what they want and expect.

⁸ <https://www.simplelists.com/tml/msg/18039730/>

⁹ For one example, see 548vas at <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>

⁷ See page 30 of the Plankwell Campaign write-up.

I look back on the way I handled things with Phil, and I really have to admit that he told me everything ahead of time, and I just didn't pay as much attention as I should have. So that's my main piece of advice. Pay close attention during this screening process, and if you have multiple applicants, consider giving them a test to see if they're really up to it.

In the case of those who responded to my second ad, I asked them to read the campaign report and write one in-character memory, something that might have happened during the protagonist's life. I told them I wanted to use that memory as background material and possibly inject it into the write-up. This was a test both of creativity and of the innate eagerness to write, two attributes I wanted in a player.

As for the applicants who didn't come through on the timeline I'd set, I still offered to allow them to participate as co-GMs, but I didn't get any takers. These people all wanted to play. But if any had taken me up on this offer, I'd have had to figure out how to fit them in, thus changing the RPG Framework under which we'd been operating. But before discussing possible RPG Frameworks with your co-authors, you'll first need to...

Step 4: Create Stages 1, 2 (& 3)

1PMG campaigns require two or three separate forums, which I call *stages*.¹⁰

Stage 1: This is where the game is actually played. In the case of a PBEM, it will probably be a mailing list that includes all the participants: the player, the co-GMs, and perhaps even observers. Decide in advance if you want observers to be able to comment on Stage 1 where the player can see what they're saying. If not, you might want to set up a separate forum (Stage 3, see below).

Stage 2: The second virtual room, channel, or mailing list includes only the co-GMs, so they can provide guidance (or vetoes) behind the scenes. Depending on the engagement level of the various co-GMs, it may involve a lot of inter-GM discussion.¹¹ Anything that's not in the Setting Document has to be fleshed out on Stage 2.

¹⁰ I'm using the term in its theater (not chronological) sense, as in a stage where actors perform.

¹¹ How does such-and-such — some minor detail — work in this world? How much do these NPCs know about x or y, and what are their motives?

Stage 3: The peanut gallery, for observer discussion, is optional. If this exists, you'll need to decide whether or not the Player is allowed in.

The pros of having a 3rd stage: It'll allow observers an opportunity to give running commentary to the co-GMs (and possibly the Player). This can be useful, as somebody who's watching the game may have a strong opinion about how something is being depicted, and they may be able to provide insightful feedback that could help steer the narrative or help clarify some detail of the setting. Crucially, because such feedback is essentially immediate, it can help the co-GMs fix any mistakes before these errors become so embedded in the plot that they can't be easily corrected. Furthermore, Stage 3 is the perfect place to groom potential stand-ins or replacements, should one of the participants call it quits for reasons personal, creative, or otherwise. Finally, if the Player can access Stage 3, it might be motivational, and the observers may even give him or her ideas on how to play at a higher level, whether by suggesting alternatives or simply asking good questions.

The cons of having a 3rd Stage: If Stage 3 exists but is forbidden to the Player, which may be the case for purposes of minimizing distractions and enhancing his or her sense of immersion, the Player might still find a way to enter Stage 3 anonymously or under a pseudonym. Instead of having a 3rd stage, you could allow verified observers into both Stages 1 & 2 and then allow them to issue their comments to Stage 2. That way the GMs would only have to monitor two forums. Making observers privy to inter-GM discussions might also enhance their ability to give useful feedback and could be a good training ground for those who want to take part in some capacity.

In the Plankwell Campaign, each of these stages is a mailing list¹² at <https://groups.google.com/>. However, this only works because we only have two GMs, so it doesn't take very long to discuss things.¹³ Even so, sometimes Timothy and I discuss things over a WhatsApp call. It's faster than typing.

If you end up with more than two GMs, you might want to consider running the GM-forum on some sort

¹² For those who don't know, a mailing list is some program living on the Internet that forwards (and, in many cases, archives) email.

¹³ As everyone knows, the length of a discussion increases exponentially with the number of participants.

of text-chat network¹⁴ or video-voice network¹⁵. Unfortunately, I don't think you can very easily run a face-to-face¹⁶ campaign using any of the various 1PMG frameworks.

Speaking of which, it's finally time to...

Step 5: Choose an RPG Framework

In order to participate in a society, it's generally necessary to assume a role in one or more social frameworks, and each of these frameworks has its own structure, which includes various roles, each with its own rights and responsibilities. For example, the framework of family may include a mother and father acting as co-heads of household along with children who are granted rights and assigned responsibilities by the parents. The framework of work may include a boss, a layer of middle managers, and regular workers, each person's rights and responsibilities specified by contract and law.

RPGs also have frameworks, the most common being the traditional framework composed of multiple players and one gamemaster (MP1G). There's also the single-player campaign, also known as a duet, which is composed of one player and one gamemaster (1P1G). In my opinion, there are systemic problems with each of these frameworks.

Under MP1G as it's been commonly practiced for the last few decades, it's generally hard for a single player to contribute to the story in such a way that the plot is dramatically altered. Granted, old-school adventures which, at least in the early years of RPGs, focused on presenting a place (sandbox) or a situation (scenario) rather than a plot, allowed more freedom, but even then, the GM was likely to put up roadblocks to prevent the PCs from wandering off the map. The reason is that GM improvisation can be great or it can suck. It just depends on the imaginative interplay between the players and gamemaster, how well they gel, but for the gamemaster, GMing by improvisation

can sort of feel like one is performing trapeze without a net. There's no adventure module, no guidebook on what happens next.

I've read numerous accounts in *Alarums & Excursions* and online about "problem players," and I've even written on this topic¹⁷, and I've come to the opinion that much of the time, these problem players, particularly the ones whose characters act against the interests of the party or at least without their general approval, are doing so in order to make a meaningful impact on the story. They're usually bored with whatever plot the GM is serving up, and so they almost instinctively try to make up one of their own, using their character to drive forward whatever idea they have in their mind. In a way, it's a test of the GM's flexibility and imagination.

Likewise, there are hilarious stories, presumably fictional, in *Knights of the Dinner Table*¹⁸, which showcase a group of players frequently taking a wrecking ball to the plans of their frustrated GM. So this one problem, lack of player freedom, and the resulting frustrations on the part of GMs over unforeseen player actions is commonplace to the point of being mockable.

Now, there are some ways to deal with this problem within the MP1G framework. A wise woman and long-time gamer once told me that when a GM notices a problem player of this type, one possible solution is to make the person "an adversarial player and (have) him play characters opposed to the party,"¹⁹ i.e. playing the monsters. However, while I've done this from time to time, I never made it a regular thing, as I didn't have as big a problem with this variety of player as other GMs because I ran a sort of laissez-faire campaign, where if someone wanted to venture off the map, I'd usually follow them, leaving the other players to decide whether or not to do likewise.

In some cases, the party would split up. This happened in the Star Trek PBEM I ran back in the 1990s.²⁰ It's not that I didn't care that two of the players were fighting. I just put player freedom high

¹⁴ For example, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) or Discord.

¹⁵ For example, Google Meet, Zoom, or Discord.

¹⁶ F2F is the traditional method, where people are in an actual (non-virtual) room, and so far as I have seen, all the other forums (PBEM lists, IRC channels, video chats) try to replicate this method by gathering everyone together in one place. However, 1PMG requires a wall of separation between the Player and co-GMs, so the co-GMs can privately work through questions and problems as they occur.

¹⁷ See my articles in *Alarums & Excursions* #305, #307, & #308 at <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>

¹⁸ <https://kenzerco.com/knights-of-the-dinner-table/>

¹⁹ I'm quoting Lee Gold's comment to me in *Alarums & Excursions* #306.

²⁰ See Turn #46 in the zipfile at <https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/trek.html>

up on my list of priorities and decided to let the cards fall where they may. Strong-willed players, I came to realize, were a sort of treasure. Usually proactive and comfortable with risk-taking, they could make great players for single-player campaigns.

Before discussing the problems of the 1P1G framework, however, it's worth bringing up another problem with using the traditional MP1G framework in a PBEM. The problem is that there are usually too many narrative perspectives in a MP1G PBEM to allow the PBEM to be novelized into a cohesive narrative. Now, granted, trying to "novelize" roleplaying is an iffy undertaking in the best of circumstances. It's so difficult to do well that few even attempt it. But if you've ever done it, you will have likely noticed this problem of head-hopping²¹, as under the MP1G framework, it is quite intractable, whereas in single-player campaigns, it's simply not an issue... unless, of course, the protagonist turns out to be highly telepathic. But rather than get into that can of worms, let's move on to these aforementioned single-player campaigns.

I used to think 1P1G was the best way to go, that it made for the most cohesive narratives, that it was less difficult to organize from a purely logistical standpoint, that it had none of the above-mentioned problems, and, to be honest, I'm still not entirely sure I was wrong. But I've GMed 1P1G campaigns for long enough now that I've noticed there are some downsides.

The first and most obvious is that there's no group camaraderie. One of the joys of roleplaying under the traditional (MP1G) framework is that moment when the players turn to each other and start bouncing around ideas, and the GM can just sit back and watch them analyze the situation and determine what to do. With a well-functioning group of players who actually like each other, this is a wonderful thing to behold. Even as a player, it's fun to engage with the other players and bat around ideas, especially when everyone is hamming it up in-character. Even if the party votes your idea down, it's still fun, and it can be somewhat funny to watch, particularly when there are multiple players doing various accents or weird voices. An outsider who walks in might be a bit discombobulated by the whole spectacle.

Likewise, under 1P1G, there are no inter-PC subplots, because there's only one PC. There can still

be inter-character subplots, but inter-PC subplots are often more interesting, because everyone knows these are two player-characters, so whatever transpires is likely to have long-term ramifications for the campaign.

Also, 1P1G campaigns are more difficult to steer for the GM, because it's paradoxically easier for the GM to herd a group of players than a single player. With a group of players, the tendency is for everyone to stay together, so everyone has to agree about where to go, and getting to agreement often takes time, which gives the GM time to think. However, in a single-player campaign, the one player acts alone and can therefore do nearly anything, taking the campaign in any direction they want to go on the spur of the moment, and the GM is required to respond quickly, at least in face-to-face play, and because of this, there's a propensity for the GM to make mistakes that may end up getting embedded into the story's plot, and these may be difficult to later correct. Even in single-player PBEMs, where the GM has plenty of time to think, GMs still make mistakes. I can attest to that.

So I thought about all these problems endemic to the MP1G and 1P1G frameworks, which everyone has been using since the dawn of roleplaying. Of course, I've heard of the occasional MP2G campaign, which is an example of an MPMG campaign, and I vaguely remember participating in one, albeit only once. It struck me as being very much akin to MP1G, except the two gamemasters were struggling not to get their wires crossed by contradicting one another. I was a player, and all I can remember is that I was unimpressed. One could argue that MUDs/MUSHs with multiple administrators are also MPMG campaigns, but they're so scripted/automated that I don't really see them as RPGs. I'm not saying that they couldn't evolve into being very RPG-like. With the advent of AI, I'm sure all sorts of things are possible, but at present it's obvious to me that there's one framework we collectively forgot to explore, and that's 1PMG.

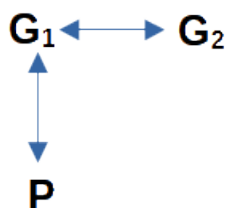
Why do I think 1PMG is worth exploring? Well, because of all the problems inherent to the other frameworks. We know these problems exist, because we've all experienced them to some degree. Now, not all gamers are going to care. The people who just want to hack away at monsters may not care that much that they're on a heavily-scripted adventure.

²¹ <https://darlingaxe.com/blogs/news/head-hopping>

Indeed, like the players in *DM of the Rings*²², their eyes may glaze over as soon as the GM starts ruminating about the backstory. But there are also those players who do care about the story. They're not just there trying to get their next skill point or experience level.

People roleplay for different reasons, and a lot has been written on this. For some people, it's primarily social. For others it's intellectual. For others, it's about the story more than the tactical or logical challenges. For some, I believe, it's about that fleeting sense of wonder and immersion that roleplaying can provoke. Ron Edwards has famously argued that people come to RPGs from either a gamist, narrativist, or simulationist perspective.²³ And, of course, as previously stated, there are those who just want to advance their character's power level to deific proportions. Bear in mind, many gamers inhabit more than one of these categories.

In any case, with such a plethora of player-types and motivations, my guess is that some people might be attracted to the 1PMG framework (the narrativists, most likely), and others (the gamists, perhaps) may have the opposite reaction. I don't know how to analyze this question without running actual campaigns, and since I've only run one 1PMG campaign, all I have to offer at this point is speculation. So nearly everything I'm about to regurgitate regarding establishing an RPG Framework is just a bunch of brain-farts. This stuff needs to get tested to see if 1PMG is a workable framework, and if so, to determine its strengths and weaknesses under different configurations. Having made this necessary if long-winded disclaimer, I'll begin discussing some of the alternatives.



First of all, there's the 1P2G variant where the second gamemaster (G_2) acts as an assistant to the primary gamemaster (G_1). The Player (P) interfaces mainly with the primary gamemaster, while the assistant gamemaster takes a mostly background role. This

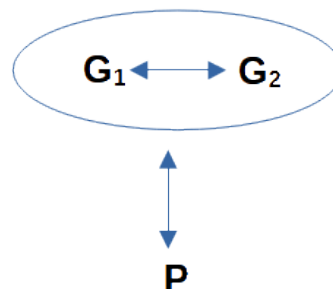
is the simplest framework to implement. It is almost the same as the 1P1G framework, which has been tried and tested fairly well. The introduction of the assistant GM eases some of the primary GM's

workload, hopefully reducing the odds of GM burnout.

When I advertised on the Traveller Mailing List that I wanted to start an experimental PBEM, I was really looking for a co-GM, but Timothy, the only person who volunteered, told me that due to his struggles with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, he wasn't up for being a co-GM, but he said he'd be happy to assist, playing the odd NPC in order to "ease into how this will all work."

During the campaign, he nearly had to drop out due to some very serious medical issues, but he kept chugging along, helping however he could, sending me character write-ups, playing NPCs as needed, and even doing the chapter editing. Indeed, he turned out to be the best editor I've ever known.

But perhaps the most important thing Timothy did was to serve as a sounding board, listening to my half-baked schemes and giving his often valuable input. As a GM, you will need someone in this role. They can be a co-GM or an assistant-GM, but either way, having someone to talk to about the campaign will help you flesh out your good ideas and, just as importantly, sidestep the bad ones.



The second 1P2G variant involves two co-GMs acting under a set of rules in which they equally share the powers of a traditional game-master. The most obvious option that occurs to me is that they could simply take

turns. They could trade the previously mentioned roles of primary and assistant back and forth every other chapter, so that G_1 takes the lead for odd-numbered chapters, and G_2 takes the lead for even-numbered chapters.

Another method might be to randomly determine who gets to make any given ruling as situations naturally arise, possibly by rolling dice or using a dice rolling script (assuming the two GMs are physically remote from each other) that reveals the results of the dice roll to both simultaneously. The co-GMs could discuss matters, roll dice as necessary, and cooperatively develop the setting on Stage 2, all out of sight of the player (P) who's on Stage 1. The two co-GMs could, of course, apply any setting or ruleset they both agree to use, but for matters not specifically

²² <https://www.shamusyoung.com/twentysidedtale/?p=612>

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNS_theory

covered by the rules or setting document, a simple *luck roll* may be applied at the discretion of either G₁ or G₂.

Luck Roll: Roll 1d6, and cascade 1s and 6s in situations where highly unusual outcomes could occur. Results are as follows:

Roll #1	Roll #2	Result
1	1	Super bad for the PC
1	2-5	Very bad
2		Bad
3		Neutral to slightly-bad
4		Neutral to slightly-good
5		Good
6	1-5	Very good
6	6	Super good for the PC

Obviously, interpretation of this rubric is situational dependent, and the two co-GMs may have conflicting interpretations. When facing such disagreements, it would be best to compromise, but if a compromise is taking too long to reach, either may call for a *luck roll* to resolve the matter. A d6 roll of 1-3 rewards the decision to G₁, and 4-6 rewards the decision to G₂.

You might ask, why go to all this trouble of having two squabbling GMs when we could just have one? The answer, the reason for all this, is that two heads are often better than one. Hence, either co-GM should feel free to call for *luck rolls* to resolve even petty matters. For example:

Stage 1/Player: I walk through the spaceport, asking around if there's any ships heading to Sashkatuvich.

1/G₁: There's an electronic ticket service that most of them use. You can access it through your VPA²⁴. You find there's a transport heading there later in the day.

1/Player: How many credits are they asking?

Stage 2/G₂: No. *Luck roll* it. On a 1, there's no transport until tomorrow.

²⁴ Virtual Personal Assistant, a semi-intelligent AI that runs in the cloud, keeping track of appointments, etc., which can be accessed through an individual's portable computer, smartphone, or cybernetic interface.

2/G₁: Fine.

2/G₂: roll d6

2/dicebot: G(2) rolled : d6 --> [1d6=6]{6}

2/G₁: Meaning what? There's multiple transports?

2/G₂: roll d6

2/dicebot: G(2) rolled : d6 --> [1d6=3]{3}

2/G₂: I could go with there being two transports, or maybe a transport and a cargo ship that has an extra crew bunk, not an actual passenger stateroom.

1/G₁: Actually, there's also a cargo ship offering a ticket for what looks like half the going rate.

1/Player: What's the catch?

1/G₁: It's a bunk and locker in the crew quarters, not a private stateroom like on a passenger transport.

1/Player: That'd be okay.

Once again, the whole purpose of having two GMs and this *luck roll* mechanic is to prompt the co-GMs to think about details of the campaign that come up during play in greater resolution *and* to allow fate a hand in crafting the story.²⁵ In doing so, it will hopefully get the GMing side of the roleplaying equation to be more imaginative and think in greater detail, which will hopefully lead to better (albeit slower) campaigns. Just as importantly, if used well, this method could provoke the plot to take surprising turns, possibly steering the campaign *off the map*, as it were. However, with two co-GMs to collaboratively think through consequences and adjust accordingly, I think it would be less scary, particularly for inexperienced GMs or experienced ones who are inexperienced at going off-script.

GMing, at its best, IMHO, is an extemporaneous performance that remembers to make the player the center of the campaign, even going so far as to give the player control of the game's direction, so that instead of the player continually following the GM's lead, jumping through the hoops of an adventure created before the campaign even began, the campaign is better described as the player figuring out how the setting works and then exploiting it according to the motivations of his or her PC. My guess is that this method of play could encourage proactivity on the part of players. However, it will require each GM to let go of the reins enough so as to enable them to compromise constructively with their co-GM.

Another option that could be attempted under the 1P2G variant of 1PMG would be to allow the

²⁵ See my comment to Michael Cule on the 5th page of my zine in *Alarums & Excursions* #580.

participants to switch roles, playing musical chairs as it were, so that each individual could take turns playing as well as GMing.

	Ch 1	Ch 2	Ch 3
Andrea	G ₁	P	G ₂
Bob	G ₂	G ₁	P
Cathy	P	G ₂	G ₁

If $G_1 \neq G_2$ in terms of their respective powers, then:

	Ch 4	Ch 5	Ch 6
Andrea	G ₂	P	G ₁
Bob	G ₁	G ₂	P
Cathy	P	G ₁	G ₂

Then simply repeat.²⁶ Back in my college days, we called this “Round-Robin Roleplaying,” except that we were operating under the traditional MP1G framework, so the only change would be who in the group was GMing. We only tried this during conventions, and while it made for a chaotic game, it was a way for players to try their hand at GMing without having to commit to it for a full adventure.

I’ve never tried Round-Robin in an actual campaign, but it occurs to me that it would be interesting to see the results under the 1P2G framework, where the fact that there are two GMs might mitigate the most obvious downsides of switching GMs mid-scenario. Of course, any long-term plans on the part of any individual participant would likely be subject to change, so it probably wouldn’t work for a murder mystery, but for other genres, it might work out okay. It might even be playable on a single stage using the mechanics of some Solo-RPG to generate encounters.

Although this does not yet exhaust the possibilities contained within 1P2G, let us move on to 1P3G. Aside from merely expanding the aforementioned possibilities, we can now assign more specific roles to the various gamemasters in consideration of the fact that some GMs are better at some facets of the job than others. For example, some GMs are great at worldbuilding and description, others are terrific at playing NPCs, and still others have an innate sense of story such that they usually know how best to push things along and, just as importantly, when not to. So maybe that’s the answer. We could simply separate

²⁶ Or if you’d rather leave it to fate, then at the beginning of each chapter, assign these roles randomly.

the traditional Game Master into three parts: G_S (the Setting-GM), G_P (the Plot-GM), and G_C (the Character/NPC-GM). Their respective domains might look something like this:

G_S (Setting-GM): G_S is responsible for the setting and its description as well as determining the likelihood of outcomes. In short, he or she would essentially provide the game’s universe as well as the mechanics for how it works in a *Setting Document*, which is a sort of evolving guide on how the setting and mechanics of the game work.²⁷ He or she may also provide guidance to G_P (the Plot-GM) or G_C (the Character/NPC GM) with respect to how specific details of the setting relate to various plot points and character details. He or she may also wish to retain the responsibility for rolling dice, although this duty may be abdicated to varying degrees.²⁸

G_P (Plot-GM): G_P takes the game universe provided by G_S and draws up the initial conditions of the story, including the likely NPCs.²⁹ This can be done to whatever level of detail G_P decides (and G_S agrees) is appropriate, and what results from this is a *Scenario Document*. G_P also narrates the resolution to in-story conflicts (situations where more than one thing could potentially happen), using the rules in the *Setting Document* to the extent he or she believes they apply, but his or her decisions can be challenged by G_S due to a perceived setting violation. G_P also provides guidance to G_C with respect to how specific details of the plot are likely to impact the knowledge and motivations of various NPCs.

G_C (Character/NPC-GM): G_C plays the NPCs,³⁰ creating their dialogue based on the initial conditions set forth by G_P . G_C ’s actions and

²⁷ Of course, for the sake of expedience, other game systems and settings may be referenced, but any modifications should be noted. These may include expanded rules for character background generation as well as rules involving the construction of the PC’s faults and foibles.

²⁸ By allowing an automated system to roll dice or allowing G_P to make the rolls with or without reporting.

²⁹ Of course, G_S may also create scenarios and offer them to G_P to use, but G_P has the right to design scenarios that are consistent with the setting.

³⁰ There may be more than one G_C if need be. In such cases, G_P is in charge of assigning each G_C to one or more NPCs.

dialogue can be challenged by G_P on the grounds of whether a given decision violates the current conditions of the plot (in a way he or she is unwilling to modify on-the-fly) or by G_S on the grounds of a setting violation (that he or she also is unwilling to modify on-the-fly).

In cases where a challenge occurs, the three GMs should discuss the situation privately on Stage 2, and if they can't come to a quick resolution, they then vote. In cases of a tie vote (such as where one abstains or there are an even number of GMs present), some random method (the roll of a d6) can be used to resolve the matter. In this way, both the setting and scenario can be modified in play.

I call this particular variant of 1P3G the SPC-Method (Egalitarian Version) in honor of the three co-GMs, but I'm sure you can come up with countless other variants.

Once you've figured out what framework you'll be using, the next thing you'll need to do is...

Step 6: Outline the Protagonist

In a traditional, MP1G campaign, the group would get together to generate characters, and the GM would tell everyone about the setting and what to expect along with any house rules worthy of mention. In a 1PMG campaign, it's much the same, but only one character needs to be generated. You can use whatever method you like.

In the case of the Plankwell Campaign, I let Phil generate the protagonist however he wanted, and I simply gave my approval.³¹ But if you want to do things differently, that's your prerogative. Whatever you decide, however, there are a few questions you should consider asking up-front.

³¹ Strangely, Phil left me the option to choose whether his character was retired or active-duty (I chose the latter, as I hadn't run an active-duty Traveller campaign for a quite a long time), and I let him choose the starting year for the campaign (he chose Imperial year 1114, which is four years after the Fifth Frontier War). Of course, it's obviously a bit strange for the GM to decide if the character is retired or active duty. Most Traveller campaigns involve retired characters. Also, most Classic Traveller campaigns start around 1105, which is the assumed date of CT's *Supplement 3: Spinward Marches*, meaning that the war is in the near future of most Traveller campaigns, whereas in this one, it was part of the backstory.

- Is this character going to be a projection of you, the player, or does this character have a personality that is different from yours, and if so, how is he or she different?

- What are the character's strengths, and what are their flaws?

- Does the character have any deeply held perception or idea about the world that is semi-irrational? What in the character's background may be the root of this outlook?

- What actor would you cast to play this character if they were depicted in a movie?

By the way, you should feel free to ignore this piece of advice. Not all campaigns need to involve a psychological study of the main character, and not all novels do this either, so if you don't want to do it, then don't. But if you do, then when choosing a flaw for the protagonist, beware there are certain flaws that may make the character unlikable to any potential readers, flaws like indifference, entitlement/arrogance, greed, officiousness, a lack of common sense, etc.³² It is perfectly okay to have a highly flawed character, particularly if the player agrees to allow the character a redemption arc after a crushing *Dark Night of the Soul*³³, but if the character is so flawed that reading about them becomes a form of psychological torture for the reader, then you'd better get to that redemption arc pretty quick, in which case your campaign write-up may end up being more of a novella than a novel.

Conversely, it's perfectly okay to have a character largely bereft of shortcomings, but if the character is too perfect, then there's nothing for them to learn and no reason for them to change, and if they don't change, then what's the point of the story? Granted, this is a modern perspective on storytelling and is perhaps even an overstatement of that perspective, but if you want the campaign write-up to conform to modern expectations, then it's something worth considering.

Of course, you and/or the player will also need to sketch out the protagonist in the traditional way that nearly all RPGs do, making a list of their attributes, skills, possessions, and the seminal events of their character history. You and the other members of the group may also wish to brainstorm a list of pre-existing relationships with various NPCs that can be introduced.

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1xkeOo6iLE>

³³ <https://careerauthors.com/dark-night-of-the-soul/>

Once this is done, you'll need to determine a few more things about how the campaign will be run, which brings us to...

Step 7: Determine Tense & Person, Etcetera

At this point, the group needs to decide in what tense and person they will write.

	1 st Person	3 rd Person
Past Tense	I said this, I did that	He said this, she did that
Present Tense	I say this, I do that	He says this, she does that

As you probably know, roleplaying is typically done in the present tense, as all the events are happening now, not at some point in the past. However, roleplaying is sort of funny when it comes to person. Around the gaming table, players usually speak in the 1st person, "I say/I do," not "my character says/does," but we all understand that it's the 3rd person that we actually mean. "I do" is shorthand for "my character does". Likewise, GMs often speak in the 2nd person, "Such and such happens to *you*," even though everyone understands that whatever happened affected *your character*, not you personally. We could and sometimes do express it either way, and yet the same thing is always understood. So roleplaying is really done in the 3rd person, and this can become somewhat problematic when converting a multi-player PBEM's email log into a campaign write-up. Since each character arguably has equal claim to the role of protagonist, there can be no singular "I".

However, in a single-player campaign, the singular "I" (and therefore 1st person) is an option, and so making use of it is something you should consider. I personally believe it increases the story's psychological depth, and in my opinion that's generally a good thing, but there may be cases where it's not.

For example, consider the Conan stories. There's a reason why Howard wrote in the 3rd person. To write them in the 1st person could have created a narrative bottleneck.³⁴ With a cerebrally laconic protagonist or one whose thought-processes you wish to remain

³⁴ Try to imagine Conan mentally narrating some fine detail of Aquilonian history.

mysterious to the reader, 1st person probably isn't the way to go.

Also, 1st person will potentially cause more work for the player, because it is arguably the case that it's really he or she who should take the play logs of Stage 1 and coalesce them into a first draft of each scene, so that the narration is cast in his or her character's voice. Note, the player doesn't necessarily have to be the person to do this, but whoever does it will almost certainly have to edit the narration, thereby creating a narrative voice.³⁵ This is an important task, so you'll have to decide whose job it is (probably yours). Whichever the case, everyone in the group needs to understand how the editorial process will work and be okay with it.

As for past tense vs. present, most fiction is written in the past tense. Because of this, you should consider using it. Having said that, there are some novels written in the present tense, so it's certainly an option. Just be aware that if you compose the narrative in the present tense, it will, at least at first, be off-putting to most readers. Hence, there's a lot here to consider, but regardless of which way the group decides to go, everyone should be in agreement on the tense and person before the campaign actually begins.

Finally, if anyone in the group has strong feelings regarding content (anything from profanity to sex to violence to politics to various themes), that should also be addressed. Some people need guardrails; others don't. There's no right or wrong. Just make sure everyone is in agreement. And don't forget to...

Step 8: Make an Ownership Agreement

Some sort of joint statement should be made in advance over how everyone is to be credited as well as who the resulting work belongs to. My general feeling is that any of the participants should be allowed to publish without monetary compensation, but that if money starts changing hands, then all co-creators should agree with the terms. However, you may wish to adopt one of the Creative Commons licenses³⁶ just to keep things clear and simple. As usual, your mileage may vary, but this is something you should discuss before you actually...

³⁵ I'll expand on this later, as there are various issues connecting to the point that you would do well to understand.

³⁶ <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/>

Step 9: Commence Play

Finally, we get to the fun part. The way from this point forward is pretty simple. You know how to roleplay, right? The GM presents a situation, the player responds, and then the GM responds to the player's response, and back and forth it goes. The only differences here are that a playlog is being preserved for future reference and multiple GMs are cooperating in order to make things more interesting. Possibly one of the GMs has the lead, or maybe there are guest GMs playing various NPCs. Regardless, the back-and-forth of roleplaying remains the same.

One thing I will suggest is that rather than simply respond to the player, take what they wrote and copy it into the first draft of the narrative, editing it as necessary in order to establish a semi-consistent narrative voice. Make sure to edit for person and tense, and then edit for what's possible or what the protagonist would notice as he or she is doing whatever it is they're doing. Insert thoughts as desired, maybe a little bit of background to clue in the reader as to something they wouldn't otherwise know, or perhaps some paranoia to up the stakes.

Here's an example of a game³⁷ that's is presumably being run via some sort of multi-channel chat forum (such as IRC or Discord).³⁸ Bear in mind that Stage 1 is where the player is, whereas Stage 2 is the GMs' private channel.

Stage 1/G₁: There was a small alcove with a wooden door beneath a slight overhang of rock.³⁹ The door itself had clearly been damaged, as there were two holes, one a little bit over three feet up from the ground and the other at almost double that height.

1/Player: Peepholes? Is anyone looking at me?

1/G₁: Were these peepholes? I couldn't see anyone looking at me, but it was dark in there, so I couldn't be sure I wasn't being observed.⁴⁰

³⁷ Not an actual game but one I'm just imagining for the purpose of illustrating how this might work.

³⁸ I personally prefer email, as it gives me more time to think, but playing by chat would certainly be quicker.

³⁹ For what it's worth, I'm taking this from *100 Dungeon Entrances* published by Azukail Games in 2022. This is from entrance #47, which is the number I just rolled on percentile dice.

⁴⁰ Notice how instead of merely responding, the GM is restating (with some minor editing) what the player wrote. That player can, of course, rephrase this into his or her character's voice if they so wish, and perhaps this should be

1/Player: Is there a handle? A knob? A lock?

1/G₁: There were two small holes where it looked like there used to be a handle, but the door had no knob or keyhole.

1/Player: I stand to the side for a moment and listen.

1/G₁: I stood to the side for a moment to listen. There was some sort of click-clacking noise.

1/Player: Click-clacking? Like stone or metal?

1/G₁: I couldn't tell if it was stone or metal.

1/Player: Is it regular?

1/G₁: After a few seconds, I heard it again.

1/Player: I try opening the door.

1/G₁: How?

1/Player: I try pushing on it softly.

1/G₁: I pushed the door softly, but it didn't budge.

1/Player: Then I'll try kicking it in.

1/Player: Wait!

1/Player: What are my odds? You said the door looks like crap, right? So better than 50/50?

1/G₁: I solidified my stance, preparing to kick the door in, but then lost my nerve. I had no idea what my odds were. 50/50? It depended on what was on the other side. For all I knew, it might be reinforced by iron bars, or maybe there was just a big stone to keep the wind from blowing it open. I had no idea.

1/Player: Okay, fine. I'll make a noise like a cat. I'll meow. But first I'm going to stand off to the side, so if anyone is looking through either of those peepholes they can't see me.

Stage 2/G₁: What do you think? (Asking G₂)

2/G₂: It would depend on whether there's enough space on the sides of the alcove where the door is situated.

2/G₁: Does a 2 in 6 chance sound fair?

2/G₂: Sure.

2/G₁: Okay, so on a 5 or 6 there's a place he can stand and not be seen, and I rolled a 6.

Stage 1/G₁: There was a small spot to the side of the door where I could stand, and nobody looking out from those peepholes would be able see me, so I stood there, flattening myself against the stone as I meowed like a cat. Then came a voice.

"Sto sep kien neb spet?"

"Et meow kat ae qut."

1/Player: What kind of language is that?

1/G₁: You have no idea.⁴¹

1/Player: I've never heard the accent before?

Stage 2/G₂: He has encountered goblins before.

encouraged.

⁴¹ <https://lingoiam.com/EnglishtoGoblin>

2/G₁: Maybe all subterranean races sound the same.
 2/G₂: I think it's worth an intelligence check.
 2/G₁: Okay, he just barely made it.
 Stage 1/G₁: I couldn't be sure, but the accent reminded me of those goblins I'd encountered back at the fort.
 1/Player: Goblins are pussies. I'll meow again.
 Stage 2/G₁: What do you think the odds are they'd fall for it?
 2/G₂: Cats are good mousers, and if there's no mice, they're good eatin'.
 Stage 1/G₁: It sounded like something was happening on the other side of the door, like someone was sliding back the bolt of some sort of lock or reinforcement. Then the door opened a crack.
 1/Player: Is it opening in or out?
 1/G₁: In.
 1/Player: Which side is opening, the side closest to me or the side away from me?
 1/G₁: The side of the door closest to me opened inward, albeit just a crack.
 1/Player: So that means if they're looking out the crack, then they're looking the wrong way.
 1/G₁: If they were looking outside the crack, they'd be looking the wrong way, but if one of them was still behind the door looking through either of those peep holes, there was now a good chance I'd be noticed.
 1/Player: I kick in the door. I go into full on battle mode.
 1/G₁: I kicked in the door, and in front of me were two goblins, a pair of knucklebones on the floor behind them.
 "Kahn!" the closest one yelled, both of them drawing their swords.
 1/Player: I said I was going into battle mode. I attack!
 Stage 2/G₂: Actually, given that they were gambling and were only expecting a cat, they might have put their weapons off to the side. Also, it might be worth your time to look at the weapons chart for Goblins on page 47 of the Monster Manual.
 2/G₁: Okay, one has a morning star and the other has a military pike. As for whether or not they grabbed their weapons, I'm pretty sure they would.
 2/G₂: How about a 1 in 6 chance they didn't.
 2/G₁: Okay. So on a 6, they forgot to grab their weapons. I rolled a 2, so they grabbed their weapons.
 2/G₂: There's still possibly some element of surprise.
 2/G₁: I'll give him a +3 to initiative. And he wins

initiative against both of them, but just barely.
 Stage 1/G₁: Slight correction.
 I kicked in the door, and in front of me were two goblins, one holding a morning star in a way that made it apparent he wasn't expecting to have to use it, while the other had a military pike.
 "Kahn!" the closest one yelled, as I slashed at him, but his buckler saved him from losing his hand. Next thing I knew, the spikes of his morning star were clanking against my armor. Meanwhile, the other one ran down an earthen passage, yelling, "Hooman! Sot's ehn!"

 As you can see, there's a narrative being constructed. G₁ isn't just responding to the player. He or she is restating the player's actions, correcting for tense. For example, "I stand to the side" gets restated as "I stood to the side." The reason for this is that by restating everything the protagonist does, says, and even thinks, it then becomes much easier to construct the first draft from the playlog.
 G₁ is also expanding descriptions in response to the player's questions. "Then the door opened a crack" becomes "The side of the door closest to me opened inward, albeit just a crack." And G₁ is correcting him/herself. Initially the goblins drew swords, but in response to some help from the assistant-GM, those swords changed into more goblin-appropriate weapons.
 Notice also that G₁ is rolling the dice. You may or may not want to do things this way. Many players like rolling their own dice. But if you don't have a dice-rolling application as part of your channel, then it's probably appropriate for one of the GMs to handle this.
 Another thing I would strongly recommend is that you should periodically remind the player to include their protagonist's private thoughts along with their actions and dialogue. If they fail to deliver, and you think it's important to the narrative, then you can (and arguably should) insert these thoughts yourself, and then see whether or not the player wishes to correct you.
 If the player disagrees about your assessment of what their character might be thinking, that's a discussion worth having. The players should have an expansive degree of agency over his or her character, however, everyone is subject to certain emotions, so if they're claiming their character has no sense of fear, for example, that might be a legitimate bone of

contention.⁴²

Now, maybe instead of using the Bisect (G_1/G_2) framework, you'd prefer to try the SPC-Method I outlined in Step 5, where G_S is the Setting-GM, G_P is the Plot-GM, and G_C is the Character/NPC-GM. For simplicity, I'll assume an AD&D-based campaign being played via IRC or Discord or any other chatroom application that enables users to access multiple channels simultaneously.

Stage 1/Player: What are my odds for picking the king's pocket?

1/ G_P : Not great. He already knows you're a thief. He's trying to hire you, remember?

1/Player: Yeah, but he knows I know that he knows, so he wouldn't be expecting it.

Stage 2/ G_P : His base % is 65.⁴³ Does that get situationally modified?

2/ G_S : Up to you.

2/ G_C : The king would have something nice and easy to wear. He's the king. He doesn't have to carry a lot of stuff. Maybe a key.

2/ G_S : Whatever. You two work it out.

Stage 1/ G_P : As far as the odds go, it's hard to say.

1/Player: If I fail, does he know I tried, or can I back out of it before committing?

1/ G_P : Depends on how lucky you are.

1/Player: I should have some idea of the odds. If it looks like it's going bad, can I stumble a little bit, so he thinks I'm grabbing onto him for support?

1/ G_P : You don't know what level the king is, and that plays into it, but if he was just some standard dude, then you'd have a 65% chance. If you want to work a "stumble, fall, and grab" into the action, it'll give you plausible deniability if you get caught, but it won't change the odds of success.

1/Player: Cool. Then I'll do it.

Stage 2/ G_S : You want me to roll percentile? 01-65 he

succeeds.

2/ G_P : Yes.

2/ G_S : 95.⁴⁴ Uh-oh.

2/ G_C (playing the king): So I caught this prick thief with his hand in my pocket?

2/ G_P : Yeah, anything over 85 means the king knows, but he said he's doing the stumble-move. Take a WIS check.

2/ G_S : Spectacular success.

2/ G_P : So does the king know this is BS, or does he just strongly suspect?

2/ G_C : Can I have him castrated?

2/ G_S : You strongly suspect but aren't 100% sure.

2/ G_P : King George is Neutral-Good.

2/ G_C : How sure am I?

2/ G_S : I would say at least 90%.

2/ G_C : So how about I just chop off one of his nuts?

2/ G_P : This might throw off the entire scenario. King George is supposed to hire him, not cut off his dangly parts.

2/ G_C : I'm a king. I can't have people trying to steal my shit. By the way, is anything in that pocket?

2/ G_P : Would he have a magic item in there?

2/ G_S : Up to you.

2/ G_P : I'm gonna say just the key to his private quarters. Or would there be a royal harem?

2/ G_S : The northern folk don't do harems, but he could have a mistress or two.

2/ G_P : And he has a queen?

2/ G_S : Most likely. And possibly children. You can determine all that within reasonable bounds.

2/ G_P : Okay, a queen and two daughters. And no mistress. At least not inside the castle.

2/ G_C : So this son-of-a-bitch was trying for the key to

⁴² There's this concept in Jungian psychology of the Shadow Self, that aspect of yourself that your ego doesn't know about, which you bury because it doesn't fit how you perceive yourself to be. I've observed that most players don't like to play out character flaws, which has made me wonder if there should be some mechanism whereby the protagonist is turned over to someone other than the player for short periods of time, if the player is unwilling to play out their protagonist's primary flaw. In this way, we might avoid the pitfall of a static protagonist.

⁴³ G_P knows this because the Setting document references 1st edition AD&D as being the primary ruleset, and the PC is an 8th-level thief.

⁴⁴ As you might recall, last month I mentioned G_S is the one who rolls the dice under this SPC-Method. The reason for this is to keep G_P and G_C honest. After all, randomness is a big part of what makes a roleplaying game a roleplaying game. G_S doing the rolling prevents G_P from cheating to make the narrative go one particular way or another. Now some people will say this is the GM's prerogative, that the whole reason GM screens were invented was to give the GM the opportunity to cheat. Well, cheating the dice, in my opinion, is a way of bending the plot, and I think it gives the GM too much power. He or she would often rather do cartwheels than be forced off the plan or off the map or what have you. In short, cheating the dice is often just another way of railroading a campaign, and I'm guessing it happens more often than GMs ever admit. But if you want to have G_P or G_C roll dice, that's up to you. Since I haven't actually tried this stuff out, I can't say how well these ideas will mesh together in actual play.

my wife and daughters. I gotta at least grill him.
 2/Gs: Over an open flame?
 2/Gc: No, verbally.
 2/Gp: What sort of grilling?
 2/Gc: Gonna call him on his bullshit. If I'm 90% sure.
 That's good enough to say something.
 2/Gp: Go ahead.
 Stage 1/Gp: As the king leans over to show you something on the map, you try picking his pocket. You touch something for a moment, something metallic, but then he turns toward you, and you have to fake like you tripped.
 1/Player: No, I don't want to touch him as a result of his turning. I'm pretending to trip over the rug, and the only reason I'm touching him is because I don't want to fall on my face.
 1/Gp: Okay. So as he leans over to point out something on the map, you fall into him, getting your hand in his pocket for a moment, and you touch something metallic, but before you can grab it, he abruptly turns, and you kind of have a little trouble withdrawing your hand as quickly as you'd like.
 1/Player: In other words, he noticed?
 1/Gc: "You are most clumsy," the king says reaching into his pocket and pulling out a silver key. "You wanted this, perhaps?"
 1/Player: "I'm so sorry, Your Majesty. I tripped on this loose rug." There's a rug, right? Kings have floor covering.
 1/Gp: Sure.
 1/Gc: "I'm rather disappointed," the king says, frowning. "I thought I was hiring the greatest thief in all Fairport, but if you're so clumsy, I see I have the wrong man."
 1/Player: He's firing me?
 1/Gc: Would you hire you?
 1/Gp: Please, no unnecessary OOC⁴⁵ on Stage 1.
 1/Gc: I'm showing him the door.
 1/Player: "I'm very sorry to have wasted your time, Your Majesty." Can I try picking his pocket again as he shows me out?
 Stage 3/Observer: LOL. Incurrible!
 3/Gs: Yes he is :-)
 Stage 1/Gp: You can try, but he's on guard now.
 1/Player: He wouldn't expect me to try it again. It's still 65%?

⁴⁵ Out-of-Character Conversation. Different groups will likely have different rules about how much OOC commentary they permit on Stage 1.

1/Gp: Whatever. Sure.
 Stage 2/Gc: Should be lower.
 2/Gs: I'm okay with keeping it the same.
 Stage 1/Player: I go for it.
 Stage 2/Gs: 14. He succeeds
 Stage 1/Gp: How are you going to go about it?
 Stage 1/Player: I'll brush up against him on the way out.
 Stage 1/Gp: Okay. You succeed. You got the key. He didn't even notice.
 1/Player: Great. As I'm saying goodbye, I'll show it to him and tell him thanks for the souvenir.
 1/Gc: The King searches his pocket. "You little son-of-a-bitch!"
 1/Player: Before he gets all that out, "Your Majesty, picking pockets is a simple matter. Avoiding rugs, however... it's a skill I have yet to master. Here's your key, and if you change your mind and decide to give me a second chance, despite my clumsiness, I promise to be more careful."
 Stage 2/Gc: This dude is smooth.
 2/Gp: Thank God. I thought I was going to have to throw out the whole adventure.
 Stage 1/Gc: "Wait," the King says. "Come back."
 1/Player: I go back.
 1/Gc: "Let me be clear. I don't trust you any farther than I can shit you out of my ass, but my need is dire, and my purse is large if you can get what I need, Thief."
 1/Player: "And what would that be, Your Majesty?"

Bear in mind, I'm cheating you insofar as I just showed you how the game might work in a Play-by-Chat (PBC) forum rather than a Play-by-Email (PBEM) forum. The purpose of this was to illustrate the process in a simple way. PBC is much faster than PBEM, and because of this, the back-and-forth dialogue between the participants usually consists of shorter packages — words, phrases, or sentences rather than paragraphs or pages. Hence, I was able to show you the gist of how this all works in a way that was relatively brief.

But it's worth remembering that PBC requires synchronous play (the participants all need to be online simultaneously), and it doesn't allow the GMs as much time to think, do research, and avoid making mistakes that end up getting embedded into the plot. So, in my opinion, while PBEMing is much slower, it offers considerable advantages. But you might disagree, and since this really boils down to personal

preference, you may wish to use 1PMG in conjunction with PBC rather PBEM.

Having said that, if used in the context of a PBEM, you will likely encounter some questions related to what you should ask of the player and how you should go about editing what they send you. In my opinion, this is a vast and largely unexplored topic, so what I will tell you is merely based on my personal experience and should be taken as such. In short, you'll need to figure out what works best for you and your co-participants in the context of the specific campaign you're running. With that broad disclaimer out of the way, I'll tell you how I've tended to operate over the past few years.

First, I found that asking for the player to submit their protagonist's private thoughts as well as actions and/or dialogue was useful, especially in the context of a 1st person narrative. But I think it would be useful regardless, as even in the 3rd person, the narrator's focus is often upon the primary protagonist, so the protagonist's thoughts are likely to bleed into the narrative to some extent.

Granted, some authors are remarkably taciturn with their protagonist's innermost thoughts and worries. I mentioned back in Step 3 how Phil hated modern writing, because he saw it as being too psychological and not action-oriented enough for his personal taste. I've already discussed this in my essay in *Alarums & Excursions* #581, but the upshot, in my opinion, is that there's no one right answer. It's simply a matter of taste.

But if you're like me, you're going to find yourself gravitating toward this notion that the themes and purpose of stories are served more by an evolution in the protagonist's thinking than a change in their circumstances. Stories in the past were mostly about the latter, and so the main characters were largely static, but that's not the way it's done anymore, and there's a reason. It's because of this widespread realization that the reader is instinctively trying to learn something from the story. In a way, watching the protagonist twist and turn through the events of the plot is sort of like watching a friend or older sibling go through some challenge, and in both instances what we're intuitively doing, at least subconsciously, is we're watching for mistakes and attempting to learn from them. That's one of the reasons, I believe, why people read stories. And this is why stories often teach morality, as well as why they're often used for propaganda. They have the

ability to change the way people think.

So the reader wants to know the protagonist's thought process, so he or she can understand why they're doing what they're doing and get a sense of their personality. What sort of person are they? Are they good? Are they kind? Do they represent the best that is within us?

So here's a question. Let's say you have a player who's playing along the lines of the players in the two play logs I've already shown you in Step 9. Are these good people, or are they bad people? Although one's a thief and the other is breaking into the lair of a bunch of creatures that are individually weaker than himself, we don't immediately know the answer to this question. Why did the thief become a thief, and what sort of thieving does he do? Does he steal from the rich and give to the poor, or does he steal from anyone and everyone and blow it all on harlots and magical intoxicants? And in the second play log, why does the warrior hate goblins so much? Did they burn his village and kill his family? Or is he simply trying to rack up some experience points to make his next level?

My argument here is that the reader intuitively wants to know what the main character is thinking, because they want to understand them and their point of view. And even if they don't necessarily agree with the protagonist's outlook on whatever overarching conflict is taking place, they at least need to be able to comprehend the protagonist's perspective and, to some extent, be able to sympathize.

So you have to include thoughts, and if you're writing in the 1st person, you also need to establish the protagonist's voice, because they're the narrator. So you've got to figure out how they think, what they would notice, what they would think with respect to what they notice, and so forth. All that has to be in there, and even the phrasing needs to be right, meaning it needs to be congruent with their actions. You don't want to have them saying one thing in their mind and then acting in a way that's completely contrary to what they were just thinking.

This sort of thing can happen, because the construction of the on-going narrative is obviously a shared project, but each section, in my opinion, has to have its own lead editor, someone who has final editorial discretion. You might rotate this authority on a chapter-by-chapter or even scene-by-scene basis, or it may reside with a single individual for the entire length of the campaign. Whatever is decided, that

person is going to have to decide how deeply they want to edit the player vs. how much they want to accept verbatim what is being offered.

Many times, to save time, a player will step on the GMs' turf, perhaps providing an expected reaction from an NPC to whatever their character is doing or saying. Sometimes, they might even include the results of an action, perhaps providing some descriptive elements for the GMs to consider using. All this is obviously within the traditional province of the GMs, but should you use it?

For myself, I try to use as much of what the player provides as I reasonably can, but I almost never use it verbatim. I like to tinker with sentences (if you get into writing, you will too). So I take what the player sends me, and I start asking several questions in no particular order. First, how much of what is being offered is reasonable to assume? Is there anything there that should be determined by rolling some dice?

For example, did the player assume the best possible outcome from the point of view of his or her protagonist or from the POV of an allied NPC? If the player provides you with good material, the temptation is to simply incorporate it without too much consideration as to the alternatives. But don't take the lazy way out.

I personally like to determine things probabilistically, usually by rolling physical dice. Obviously, if the player sent me a really interesting reaction, especially one that isn't a clear victory for the protagonist, I'm more likely to use it with minimal editing. I vaguely remember this being more or less the case in Chapter 43 of the Plankwell Campaign, where the protagonist was sparring. I think I wrote up something fairly lame, and then Conrad revised and expanded it into something that was actually quite good. Of course, I probably did some minor editing, but I seem to remember being impressed with his writing, so I let him stomp his way into my territory as a GM, because what he sent me was so good and didn't aggrandize his character.

But I can also offer Chapter 55 as an example where he proposed that his character discover some element of a quasi-criminal organization operating on his own ship.⁴⁶ I sort of liked the idea, but I wasn't ready to commit to it without consulting with the Traveller Mailing List (TML)⁴⁷, and although they

⁴⁶ <https://groups.google.com/g/plankwell-pbem-s1/c/j3IOfqVa7a8/m/LFMCEtX5AAAj>

⁴⁷ <https://lists.simplelists.com/tml/msg/32383657/>

also liked the idea, I sensed that this was something that shouldn't come quite so easily, so I turned the question back to Conrad, essentially asking how much risk the protagonist would be willing to take in order to discover whatever there was for him to potentially discover.⁴⁸ The result was that he essentially withdrew the suggestion.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, I'm keeping his idea in my back pocket, because it's a good one, but one which I'd need to think about.

Editing what a player sends you isn't always so substantive in terms of modifying the setting or introducing a new plot element. Sometimes it involves simply phrasing things more succinctly. But when you do this, particularly in a 1st person narrative, you are modifying the narrative voice, so just be aware of that. You might ask the player if they're okay with the edits you're doing. Give them a chance to review the 1st draft, which brings us to...

Step 10: Create a 1st Draft

Ideally, in my opinion, the entire group needs to be involved to some extent in the editing process, but coalescing the play log into a 1st draft will likely be the job of a single person. So far, in the Plankwell campaign, I'm the one who's been doing this, and I think there's a good case to be made for the lead-GM being responsible for the creation of this document.

However, there are other possibilities worth considering. As I stated previously, perhaps, especially in the case of a 1st person narrative, the player should take an active role in rephrasing their protagonist's thoughts and even their perceptions into their character's own narrative voice. I could envision a multi-stage process wherein the player states what the protagonist thinks, says, and does. Then the GM restates this, including the outcome. Then the player restates it again, only editing for voice, before appending their protagonist's new thoughts, dialogue, and/or actions. Then, if the GM has any questions or concerns with respect to the player's edits, they discuss these before moving on with the new outcome.

Another option is to simply allow the lead GM carte blanche in constructing the initial version of the

⁴⁸ <https://groups.google.com/g/plankwell-pbem-s1/c/j3IOfqVa7a8/m/Dvx49-gWAgAJ>

⁴⁹ <https://groups.google.com/g/plankwell-pbem-s1/c/j3IOfqVa7a8/m/17qredUoAgAJ>

first draft. The player and assistant GM then come in to suggest revisions. Obviously, this is more expedient, but I'm not sure it's the best method.

In short, I'm still a long way off from being able to recommend a best practice with respect to this question, so different methods will need to be tested. Regardless, you're going to need to think about how you want to handle this and then communicate your preferences to the other members of your group.

Rather than prattle on about the various options, let's look at what a 1st draft of the 1st chat log of Step 9 might look like.

Within a small alcove, beneath a slight overhang of rock, there was a wooden door. It was weathered and had clearly been damaged, as there were two rectangular holes, one a little bit over three feet up from the ground and another at almost double that.

Were these peepholes? I couldn't see anyone looking at me, but it was dark in there, so I couldn't be sure I wasn't being watched.

There were two much smaller holes — these looked like nail holes — where there probably used to be a handle, but it had either fallen off of its own accord or someone deemed it unnecessary. Hence, the door had no discernable knob or keyhole.

I stood to the side for a moment, intently listening. There was some sort of click-clacking noise. I couldn't tell if it was stone or metal, but after a moment, I heard it again. It didn't sound like metal.

I pushed the door softly, but it didn't budge. Then I set my stance, preparing to kick it in. One good, solid kick, and maybe it would open. Maybe. But what if it didn't?

What were the odds? Half yes and half no? It depended on what was on the other side. For all I knew, this door might be reinforced by iron bars, or maybe there was just a big stone to keep the wind from blowing it open. I had no idea.

And if it didn't open, what then? I'd have no choice but to turn back. But if this were the goblins' lair, I doubted I'd get far. Their wolves would hunt me down. Even if I managed to hide for a time using my invisibility potion, they'd track me through my scent, and when I'd finally used up the remainder of the potion playing hide and seek, then they'd find me, and they'd be

organized and ready for a fight.

If only I could get past this door, I could quaff the potion and find somewhere to hide. I could wait and then hit them with oil and fire when they were at their most vulnerable. But how could I get them to invite me in?

Standing there, debating with myself over what to do, I noticed a small spot to the side where I could stand out of view of anyone inside looking out through one of those rectangular holes, so I positioned myself there, flattening myself against the stone. Then I meowed like a cat.

"Meow!" Too loud? "Meow."

There soon came a pair of voices.

"Sto sep kien neb spet?"

"Et meow kat ae kut."

I couldn't be sure, but their guttural accent reminded me of those goblins I'd encountered back at the fort. So this was their lair, after all.

As far as monsters went, goblins were hardly the brightest, so I meowed again. Cats, after all, were as useful to them as they were to us humans, and even if there were no mice bothering them, goblins were known to eat pretty much anything they got their hands on.

Pretty soon, it sounded like something was happening on the other side of the door. Someone was sliding back the bolt of some sort of lock or reinforcement. Then the side of the door closest to me opened inward, albeit just a crack.

If they were peering through the crack, they'd be looking the wrong way. But if one of them was still behind the door looking through one of those two rectangular holes, there was now a good chance I'd be noticed.

Which meant I had to act.

I turned and kicked the door in with all the force I could muster, causing it to swing wide open, and on the other side, stumbling backward, were two very surprised goblins. The closest held a morning star in a way that made it apparent he didn't expect to have to use it, while the other had a military pike.

"Kahn!" the closest one yelled, as I slashed at his head with my sword, but he put up his arm, his buckler saving him from losing his hand. Next thing I knew, the spikes of his morning star were clanking against my armor.

Meanwhile, the second one ran down an earthen passage, yelling, “Hooman! Sot’s ehn!”

As you can see, the narrative has been somewhat expanded compared to what was in the chat log. A few details were added to make things slightly more vivid. I’m terrible at writing descriptions, so I’m sure most of you will be able to do much better than this. But the main difference has to do with the protagonist’s inner thoughts.

I’ve just got done saying it, but I’ll say it again, stories aren’t so much about action as they are about characters, and so you need to spend even more time on their thoughts than on their actions, because it’s those thoughts that illustrate the character to the reader and give a sense of gravity to their actions. Without their thoughts, the readers never get to know them, and so they won’t care what happens to them.

Notice also how restating the player’s actions as the scene unfolded made the construction of this narrative a lot easier. I suggest you do this sort of restatement whenever you can, but bear in mind that this restatement, although it will make composition of the 1st draft easier, is still only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the overall editing process.

For example, you might want to dramatically expand on the various descriptions. What would the protagonist notice? And what would they think about what they notice? I realize I’m repeating myself, but it bears repeating, as these are questions you’re going to need to ask yourself on a continual basis.

And don’t forget to look for opportunities to insert a little bit of background, although preferably in small, bite-sized chunks for easier digestion by any prospective readers. Also, as I said before, a narrative voice will need to be established, and in the case of a 1st person narrative, the player is going to need to have a large hand in setting its tone.

As you engage in this form of roleplaying with different players, one thing you are nearly certain to notice is that some players will give you a lot of in-character thoughts to work with and others won’t. In the case of the former, you’re in luck, as you’ll have a lot of material to work with, but in the case of the latter, you’re going to need to stop the action every so often and ask what their character is thinking.

Let me be the first to admit, this is all a bit tricky, but as far as I can tell, there’s no other way. The play log, if it consists merely of actions, consequences, and reactions written in a cursory fashion (i.e., “I swing”,

“You hit, 6 damage, and he swings and misses”), will not constitute an engaging narrative. Not only do you need to sprinkle in a lot of description as well as some in-character thoughts, but you also need to dwell on those moments of decision, and you especially need to dwell on the moments of indecision, where the protagonist is agonizing over what to do.

Also, even if you do everything perfectly, the 1st draft will still be a 1st draft, meaning there’s a lot more editing (and probably a fair amount of rewriting) you’ll need to do if you want to produce something of professional quality.⁵⁰ However, in terms of simply generating a campaign report of amateur quality, which is nonetheless readable, this method works.

And the good news, for what it’s worth, is that going through this process of revising what the player sends you while sprinkling in various thoughts and perceptions the protagonist might be having will likely prompt you to start thinking like a writer, and it may even (*gasp*) feel like work from time to time, particularly as you’re getting your sea legs. There might be days you spend an hour or more doing a particular update, because you want to massage it into something that’s not too terrible.

But rather than scaring you with how much work you’ll soon be doing, let’s look at what a 1st draft of the 2nd chat log might look like.

I’d never picked a king’s pocket before and found the itch to see what a kingly pocket might possess to be simply irresistible. As he leaned over to point out something on the map, I fell into him, tripping on the rug, as it were, and getting my hand in his pocket. There was something in there, something metal, but before I could make it mine, he turned into me, and I was left with nothing except a hand in his pocket for a moment too long.

“You are most clumsy,” the king said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a silver key. “You wanted this, perhaps?”

“I’m so sorry, Your Majesty. I tripped on the rug.”

“I’m rather disappointed.” He frowned. “I

⁵⁰ It isn’t so ludicrous a notion as it might first appear. I’ve heard that *Record of the Lodoss Wars* started out as a bunch of campaign notes, and the *DragonLance* novels were apparently an RPG campaign before they became books. See https://www.reddit.com/r/rpg/comments/1mq20qs/what_are_some_pieces_of_media_that_use_ttrpgs_as/

thought I was hiring the greatest thief in all Fairport, but if you're so clumsy, I see I have the wrong man." He began showing me out the door.

"I'm very sorry to have wasted your time, Your Majesty."

As I left, in apparent disgrace, I brushed against him, and the key was in my hand, as perfect a pilfer as I'd ever perpetrated. Pity it would be ill-advised to keep it.

"Fare thee well, Your Majesty," I said, holding up my prize. "And thanks for the souvenir."

"You little..."

"Your Majesty, picking pockets is a simple matter. Avoiding rugs, however... is a skill I have yet to master. Here's your key, and if you change your mind and decide to give me a second chance, despite my clumsiness, I promise to be more careful."

"Wait," the king said. "Come back."

I re-entered his study, each of us now wary of the other.

"Let me be clear," he said. "I don't trust you any farther than I can dump you out of my derrière⁵¹, but my need is dire, and my purse is large if you can get what I need, thief."

"And what would that be, Your Majesty?"

Once you've completed a 1st draft of a chapter, you then need to share it with the group, so they can...

Step 11: Edit the 1st Draft into a 2nd Draft

First, make sure your 1st draft is in standard manuscript format. In other words, you need to use a 12-point font, one-inch margins, and double-spacing. Also, .docx format is the current standard, so it's best to convert your document into this if you're not already using it.

Second, upload the file to Google Drive⁵². Note, if you don't already have a Google Account, you'll probably need to create one, but fear not. They're free. The only catch I'm aware of is they'll probably use everything you upload to train their AI, but just think

⁵¹ If you're going to share your campaign report with others, it's advisable to edit out any profanity, although, to be perfectly honest, I don't always do this.

⁵² <https://workspace.google.com/products/drive/>

of it as a form of immortality.

Third, go to the icon for the file you just uploaded to your Google Drive and open it as a Google Document (right-click, "Open with", "Google Docs").

Fourth, get a link to share what you've written (left-click on "File", "Share", "Share with others", change "Restricted" to "Anyone with the link", change Role=Viewer to Role=Commenter, and click the "Copy link" button; this will copy the link to your buffer). You can now paste it into a document or email using Ctrl-V.

Fifth, send an announcement telling the other people in your group as well as any outside editors about the file you uploaded and giving a deadline for comments. Make sure to include the link you copied to your buffer during the previous step.

Sixth, come back after the deadline and take a look to see what people said, and decide whether or not to adopt their editorial suggestions.

As for the other people in your group as well as the outside editors, here's what they need to do to participate in this step.

First, they need to click the file link contained within your announcement.

Second, they need to make sure they're in "Suggesting Mode" (the word "Suggesting" should appear near the upper-right corner of the document. If they see "Editing" instead, they should change it to "Suggesting" using the drop-down menu).

Third, they should make corrections to the text just as if they were editing a normal document. Instead of their edits becoming permanent, however, they'll show up along the righthand side of the page as suggestions to be either accepted or rejected. They can also make comments by highlighting some text they want to comment on, right clicking it, and then selecting "Comment", and when they finish writing their comment, they need to make sure to hit the "Comment" button so it gets posted along the righthand side of the page along with their editorial suggestions.

When they've finished with their corrections and comments, they can simply close the browser window. And they can come back to the document later by using the same link they originally used to enter the document. As long as other people's comments and corrections haven't been accepted or rejected by the document owner, everyone should be able to see everyone else's suggestions.

Once the 2nd draft's final editor decides that a

chapter is truly finished, he or she can merge it into the campaign write-up, putting it online for everyone to download. Yes, there are a lot of steps, but if you follow this general framework, you'll end up with a semi-polished campaign write-up, one that you can share with others.

If you need help with any part of this including the editing process, let me know.

Jeff Zeitlin, who was the person who asked me to write this, had some specific questions that he wanted me to address, so I'll do my best.

- How can I be sure that my campaign idea is workable under 1PMG?

If it's combat-heavy, then it's probably not a good fit. I can't say this with absolute certainty, of course, but my guess is that 1PMG works best for campaigns that lean toward roleplaying rather than roll-playing.

- How much prep should I expect to need to do, and how often?

It depends on you. Personally, I hardly do any, but I'm irredeemably lazy. That said, I occasionally have a burst of creative energy, and so I'll write down ideas, usually fragments of potential scenes or the perspective of a particular NPC. Granted, I've been running the campaign in the Official Traveller Universe, so there's a ridiculous amount of published material to draw from. If I were running the campaign in a setting of my own creation, there would be a lot more prep work.

- Do I need anything special beyond the usual stuff for a ttRPG?

It might help to have a copy of *The Emotion Thesaurus* by Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi.⁵³ It's a general reference for writers, showing a bunch of different ways to describe a character having an emotional moment rather than resorting to saying something like "they looked angry." Ackerman and Puglisi have a whole series of these books, but this one is the most useful.

⁵³ <https://www.amazon.com/Emotion-Thesaurus-Writers-Character-Expression/dp/1475004958>

- Assuming that FTF, VideoConf, and PBEM are all viable, how should I decide which?

It depends on your level of patience and how many people there are in the group. I prefer PBEMing because it's asynchronous. Everyone can do it whenever it's convenient. But PBEMing is slow. Personally, I like slow. The slower the game, the more time I have to think. But your mileage may vary.

My suggestion is that you start with PBEMing and then move it to a synchronous medium such as IRC, Discord, or some other platform whenever you want to play out a scene more quickly. As for FTF, I doubt this will work, because the GMs need to have a private way to communicate with each other. VideoConf could work so long as the GMs have a private channel.

- How often should we *meet*?

In the Plankwell PBEM, I made the request that the player respond within three days and said I'd try to do the same. However, we haven't always met this deadline. Life, as we all know, has the awkward habit of getting busy every now and then, but the important thing is to communicate whenever this is happening. For example, whenever one of us is going on some trip and expects to be out of contact for a little while, we let the others in the group know about it, and so we usually end up taking a hiatus from the campaign around Christmas and those sorts of holidays.

Bear in mind, I've never actually talked to either of our players and have only occasionally talked to my assistant GM. So as you can discern from all this, the time commitment is fairly minimal, but it is ongoing. Timothy has mentioned how the PBEM has the quality of being "always on", where every few days it asks for a little bit of time, possibly as much as a half-hour or even longer. That's certainly less time than a weekly campaign will consume, but at least with a weekly campaign, you know well in advance how much time you need to give it and when.

- How do I divvy up the ref work between me and my co-ref?

Talk to your co-ref. See what they're willing to do. Timothy wanted a background role, and that was fine with me. But if you want someone who's more in the foreground, then you need to let them know. It also

depends on how much control you're willing to relinquish. If there's an NPC you want played in a particular fashion, you need to do it yourself.

In addition to these questions, I'll add one more that Jeff didn't think to ask.

- Can 1PMG be played with AI taking the part of the player and/or an assistant GM? In short, can it be used as a method of authorship?

And my answer to this last question is that I don't know for certain given the state of the technology as it currently stands, but as time goes by and AIs continue to get smarter, the answer will at some point in the not-too-distant future almost certainly be yes.

I tried roleplaying with two different AIs just as an experiment and documented it in A&E #570 & #586.⁵⁴ However, I also discussed some concerns I would likely have with respect to using true AGIs in this way in my comments to Lisa Padol in A&E #579 & #581. So the short answer is that you're just going to have to experiment in order to find out.

As I said at the beginning of this essay, 1PMG is a potentially expansive territory, so we're going to have to learn our lessons the hard way, by exploring the terrain and learning from our mistakes. If you try this out, let me know what you discover, and I'll be sure to pass it on.

⁵⁴ See 570vas & 586vas at <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>

